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AUTHOR Ohia, Uche; Hayes, Delores M.  
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## ABSTRACT

At Virginia Union University, an historically black institution in Richmond, Virginia, assessment, testing, and faculty development are connected in a systematic approach designed to determine what students need to know, demonstrate how much students know, and decide what needs to be done to enhance student learning through teaching effectiveness. Student competencies, in terms of program and course outcomes, are developed by faculty. The value-added approach is used in monitoring student progress from the time of entering Virginia Union to the time of separation. Standardized instruments and in-house tests are used to measure progress in students' skill development. Observed deficiencies in students' knowledge and skill development are targeted and addressed through programmed changes in teaching techniques and through application of technology and other innovations. Student evaluation of instruction is used to evaluate the effectiveness of individual faculty. Faculty development activities focus on development of skills in innovative classroom methods, freshman orientation, and student advisement. The role of the Director of Assessment Services in implementing this vision includes, among other responsibilities, reviewing and recommending assessment instruments and procedures, familiarizing faculty with program goals, collecting assessment data, and providing a database to assist in evaluation of instruction and curriculum. (Contains 15 references.) (JDD)

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**CONNECTING ASSESSMENT, TESTING AND FACULTY  
DEVELOPMENT: THE VISION OF EXCELLENCE AT  
VIRGINIA UNION UNIVERSITY**

**PRESENTERS**

**UCHE OHIA**

*DIRECTOR, ASSESSMENT, TESTING AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT*  
**VIRGINIA UNION UNIVERSITY**  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23220  
PHONE: (804) 257-5748

**DELORES M. HAYES**

*CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY*  
**VIRGINIA UNION UNIVERSITY**  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23220  
PHONE: (804) 257-5660

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CONNECTING ASSESSMENT, TESTING A FACULTY DEVELOPMENT:  
THE VISION FOR EXCELLENCE AT Virginia Union University.

ABSTRACT

*In this methodological presentation, the connection between three activities which are focused on as the tools to develop, monitor and enhance student learning and development will be examined. The progress of Virginia Union University in this her vision of academic excellence will be discussed and highlighted.*

*Assessment, testing and faculty development are the three activities that inform and provide this private institution with the catalyst to:*

- 1. determine what the students need to know.*
- 2. demonstrate how much students know from the time they are ready to graduate.*
- 3. decide what needs to be done to enhance student learning through teaching effectiveness.*

*First, by using the value-added approach in assessment, student progress is monitored from the time of entering Virginia Union to the time of separation from the institution. Second, by focussing on testing, progress in students' skills development is monitored using some standardized instruments. Third, by focussing on faculty development programming, observed deficiencies in students' knowledge and skills development are targeted and addressed through programmed change of teaching techniques, and application and use of technology and other innovations.*

*In summary, the three interlocking activities of Assessment, testing and faculty development promote student learning and achievement of academic objectives. In the envisioned connection, institution-wide assessment monitors student development through the value-added approach using standardized testing. Data from these tests subsequently inform professional development activities of faculty which in turn enhance student development through improved teaching techniques.*

# **CONNECTING ASSESSMENT, TESTING, AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT: THE VISION FOR EXCELLENCE AT VIRGINIA UNION UNIVERSITY:**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **History And Mission of The University**

Virginia Union University, located in Richmond, Virginia, was founded in 1865 to provide quality education for African-Americans. That students will develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for enriching their own lives and those of the communities in which they will serve remains the generating force behind the University's total academic endeavor. A foundation in the liberal arts and sciences is designed to acquaint all students with the traditions of Western culture and African-American heritage. The University encourages scholarly inquiry and freedom on discussion in the search for professional excellence, stable values, and a sense of personal worth. The University operates with a faculty of 80, and a staff of 155, serving a total student body of approximately 1500.

Undergraduate academics at Virginia Union University (VUU) are

organized into two schools under the administration of a Vice President for Academic Affairs. The School of Arts and Sciences, and the Sydney Lewis School of Business Administration are each administered by a Dean. The School of Arts and Sciences houses eleven degree granting departments, and the Sydney Lewis School of Business Administration houses two degree granting departments. The Deans of the two Schools report directly to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

### **Background and Purpose of Assessment**

Erwin (1991) offered the most convenient definition of assessment as "the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development" (p.15). The latest emphasis on establishing assessment programs began with the accountability movement of the mid 1960s and 1970s as the result of concern for accounting for increasing government expenditures in education and the felt need to hold someone responsible for the output of schools (Ballantine, 1989). According to Ornstein (1977), the concept of accountability became linked to many evolving educational trends,

including management by objectives, criterion-referenced testing, assessment of teacher performance, and program evaluation, among others (p. 70). While beginning at the public school level, this emphasis spread throughout the educational enterprise.

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools responded to general social pressure for improvement in education and accepted the challenges of accountability for institutions of higher education in the South. Supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education, the Commission focused its attention on developing a means of encouraging institutions to establish internal systems of planning and evaluation through which institutional self-examination becomes a continuous rather than a periodic process (SACS, 1984). This activity culminated in the establishment of Section III, Institutional Effectiveness, of the Criteria for Accreditation. The intent of Section III is that assessment data are used to guide improvement in curriculum, teaching effectiveness, institutional management, and learning.

## **The Virginia Union Process**

Taking its lead from the strong trend toward general and extensive program evaluation in higher education, and the movement of SACS in this area, the administration and faculty of Virginia Union University became committed to establishment of its assessment program. To this end, an Assessment Task Force was organized in 1987. The Task Force recognized the need for "hard data" on the academic program, teacher effectiveness, and student acquisition of test sophistication. In order to secure the needed data, the Task Force proposed development of "The University-Wide Assessment Center Program".

The proposed Assessment Center Program originally included a two-fold focus. The first component was the development of a competency-based system for measuring levels of acquisition of particular skills and knowledge by students. The second component of the focus was development of systematic data collection, data processing and dissemination to faculty and administration.

The program would function in such a way as to provide faculty and administration with information for use in:

- \* Monitoring student progress through the academic program.

- \* Verifying that each student attained a level of proficiency in knowledge and skills consistent with expectations of graduate schools and prospective employers.
- \* Comparing the educational competence of Virginia Union University graduates with that of graduates of other colleges and universities.
- \* Developing and implementing instructional interventions when needed.
- \* Providing a data base from which to generate instructional research.
- \* Exposing students to nationally standardized tests.
- \* Assisting faculty in developing techniques for the improvement of teacher-made tests and other classroom assessment techniques.

The heart of the assessment program would be an Assessment and Testing Center or Office operating under the management of a Director of Assessment Services. This Director would have expertise in assessment and would be responsible for establishing, directing and/or monitoring all activities relevant to assessment.

The initial responsibilities of the Director of Assessment Services included all of the following:



- \* Meet with faculty and staff to discuss and formalize assessment/measurement "particulars" relative to the desired competencies for students.
- \* Review and recommend testing and other assessment instruments and procedures to faculty and staff.
- \* Schedule and arrange assessment familiarization sessions to ensure that faculty and staff understand the goals and methods of the program and their specific roles in it.
- \* Collect assessment and testing data.
- \* Provide a data base to assist in the evaluation of instruction and curriculum.

Assessment for Virginia Union, as described above, identifies the total process of evaluating the effectiveness of instruction and curriculum, and planning and effecting data based changes. This process includes identifying learning needs of students and areas of the curriculum to be changed, identifying directions for faculty development, and evaluating student acquisition of knowledge and skills.

The Office of Assessment and Testing in this operationalization, acts as an essential feedback mechanism through which faculty and

administration are enabled to identify strengths and weaknesses in existing programs, and develop plans for needed change based on sound information. Test scores of students, scores from evaluations of instruction by students and faculty, and scores from evaluations of instruction and programs by faculty constitute the data collected, analyzed and formatted in the Office of Assessment and disseminated to faculty. This connection between assessment and testing is a foundation of the "value-added" approach (Astin, 1977) to assessment and change.

Once faculty developed specific performance objectives for academic programs and then for courses, test results would constitute the data that would allow the question of effectiveness to be addressed. In addition to this central issue, was the issue of the ability of the students to perform well on tests of all types. Faculty had identified the need for test sophistication among students, and test preparation skills among faculty.

The concept of a university-wide assessment program that links student performance, curriculum content, and teaching effectiveness seemed straight forward and easily comprehended. Implementation of the concept turned out to be neither easy nor as straight forward as

could be wished for. The Task Force identified financing the project as the first and most serious problem. This problem was solved by making assessment an additional program thrust to the already existing faculty development program being supported with Federal funds under Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965. In the subsequent grant proposal, "The University-Wide Assessment Center Program" was proposed as "Strengthening Assessment, Testing, and Faculty Development". The new thrust was approved and requested funds provided. The University then began its search for a Director of Assessment Services. The first person to occupy this position arrived on Campus in October, 1987.

## **CONNECTING ASSESSMENT, TESTING, AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

### **The Blue Print**

During the work of preparing the grant proposal, the Task Force developed a "blueprint" for implementation of what has since been known as the Assessment, Testing, Faculty Development Program that was now a part of the University's Title III grant. First, student competencies as both program and course outcomes would be

developed by faculty. This process, undertaken as curriculum review, would be engaged in by the entire faculty. Its first phase began in 1988 with the appointment of the General Education Committee. This committee was charged with structuring a sound general education program that would encompass the first two academic years, and be a firm foundation for the academic majors. The General Education program was to also be structured so as to evidence a certain level of completeness in itself as the "core" curriculum. This required in-depth review of trends in general education program structure and content as such programs were being restructured at other colleges and universities. Specific needs of the particular entering student body were to be identified and provided for in structuring this program.

The second phase of curriculum review would involve development of competencies/outcomes statements for the final two years of the majors. Courses would be revised in content and focus as indicated by the established outcomes, and new courses would be developed if needed. This phase was the responsibility of the different departments. The work was begun at the same time the General Education Committee began its endeavors and is now nearing completion.

The means for evaluating the effectiveness of the "new" curriculum required investigation of evaluation methodology. The Task Force decided to adopt the "value-added" approach which requires "standardized test scores for students at different points in their educational experience" according to Nichols (1991, p. 142). The Blueprint, therefore, called for establishing a system of testing which included testing the entire entering freshman class upon entry to the University. This group would be retested using the same instrument upon completion of the General Education core curriculum. These same students would be tested as rising juniors using selected exit - of- the-major test such as Major Field Achievement Tests (MFAT) at the end of their sophomore year, and again just before graduation.

In connecting assessment to teaching and learning, Virginia Union institutionalized Student Evaluation of Instruction as a standard part of faculty evaluation since the 1970s. As at many other institutions, this evaluation was originally used in retention and dismissal decisions. The Blueprint now called for focus on this mechanism as a means for identifying weaknesses and strengths in instruction. Weaknesses identified from this instrument, and those identified by faculty as they proceeded through the curriculum review

process would form the basis for extension of the Faculty Development portion of the Assessment Program.

### **Establishing and Organizing the Connections**

The initial faculty development program already mentioned was established to encourage and support faculty in attainment of terminal degrees. The new extension would add activities not part of an established academic program. This included attendance at internal and external workshops, seminars and conferences for development of skills in innovative classroom methods, the test preparation skills mentioned earlier. Acquisition of skills in other subjects such as Freshman Orientation, and areas such as student advisement, that would enhance the faculty's overall ability to serve the student body optimally were also included.

Responsibilities of the Director of Assessment and Testing in this process included selecting and presenting tests and testing formats to the faculty, briefing faculty on the availability of consultants; setting up procedural calendars for administration of test instruments and for evaluation of instruction; collecting, analyzing and formatting data for use by the faculty and administration. Additionally, the Director

of Assessment and Testing would keep records, be accountable for the operation of the Assessment Program as a Program supported by Title III, and undertake to establish VUU as a Testing Center of the administration of national standardized tests such as the GRE.

During the tenure of the first Director of Assessment and Testing, the need for a forum for interaction between the director and the faculty became apparent. A great deal of the Director's time was spent traveling about the campus to talk with division and department chairs. Departments requested the director to attend their meetings and brief them on the evolving assessment structure and procedures. The director was also invited to the division meetings at which the same information given at each of the departmental meetings was repeated. However, the director was NOT expected at and rarely invited to attend General Faculty Meetings at which official action on academic policy and procedures was finalized. The problems with this setup were serious.

The idea of a committee consisting of representatives of each department which could meet with the director, articulate the interests and needs of the departments and interact within the departments to accomplish assessment objectives agreed on by this committee

solidified. Thus the Board of Assessment and Testing (BOAT) was established at the end of the 1989-90 academic year and began its work in 1990-91. At establishment, the Chair of the BOAT was a faculty member appointed by the VPAA.

### **Progress in Implementation**

During 1990-91, coordinated efforts of the BOAT and the Director of Assessment and Testing achieved the following:

- Outcome statements and performance indicators for the General Education Program were finalized.
- The Academic Profile Test was selected as the instrument to initiate phase one of the assessment of the General Education Program, was administered in August, 1991 to 391 entering freshmen. ( The test results were to provide baseline data for evaluating the effectiveness of the General Education curriculum in 1993. )
- A faculty workshop for administration of the MFAT was conducted in March, 1991. The test was administered in April, 1991 to juniors and seniors in applicable subject areas. (This test does not include Social Work or Accounting)
- The "Reading, Writing, and Speaking Across the Curriculum" program



was initiated to assist faculty in developing techniques for inclusion of and emphasis on these activities in regular classes.

1991-92 saw the institution of a year-long process of curriculum review that focused on the last two years of the academic program. This was also the year in which the new long range plan "Visions 1994" was developed. A Curriculum Review Committee was established to monitor and coordinate the process. During the second semester, this committee merged with the General Studies Committee to consolidate the student and program outcomes and curriculum initiatives that had been generated, into one "new and improved" academic program that would be assessed through the "value-added" approach.

The 1992-93 academic year ushered-in the beginning of a new five-year grant cycle for strengthening assessment, testing and faculty development. Granted that departments have been working to define and develop performance indicators for each major program, the newly appointed director met with each unit chair to document the progress made in assessing major disciplines. A documentation of the findings from these dialogues was then compiled and used as a basis for deciding on future plans and actions. This formed the basis for

developing timelines as well as issuing "guidelines for assessment in the major" for use by all departments. A major discovery that resulted from these initial contacts was the fact that the Accounting department was well ahead of all the others. It had developed a manual on assesement in this discipline and was at the point of revising this and incorporating strategies to remedy observed flaws in the program. The existence of this document was publicized. It was recommended that others adopt it as a model. Additionally, materials and tapes on assessment were procured to guide expected faculty contributions.

During this year, efforts continued in coordinating academic departments selection of exit- of - the - major instruments to use as a value-added measure for discipline-based assessment. Seven departments elected to use The Major Field Achievement Tests (MFAT). These are Biology, Business Administration, Literature in English, Mathematics, Music, Psychology, and Sociology. A few departments did not find the MFAT relevant to their program objectives. These opted to use other suitable standardized instruments such as AICPA and ACS examinations. The remaining departments (History/Political Science and Social Work) are currently exploring the possibility of developing a local test.

Towards the end of the spring semester, all seniors and rising juniors were tested with these instruments. The scores for the seniors would constitute post-test scores for those who pre-tested with the same instrument in 1991. The rising juniors scores will provide the pre-test data to use in comparing their achievement when post-tested in the spring of 1994. Title III funds provided for strengthening assessment, testing and faculty development or the major disciplines, were used to purchase exit-of-major tests which were administered at departmental levels. The results of the testing component provided feedback to the student and the instructor about the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process.

The faculty voted to adopt the newly restructured general education or core curriculum during this academic year. Establishing performance indicators for this new curriculum was successfully accomplished through the involvement of a group of faculty who used the skills acquired following attendance at a conference on the general education curriculum to guide the committee that oversaw this assessment directed task. As a result of these efforts, VUU now has a new general education program. Courses relevant to the developed performance indicators have been identified and will be offered from

1993-94 fall semester.

With the faculty's earlier endorsement, The Academic Profile was administered to some 294 incoming freshmen in August of 1992 in order to yield the pre- test data which would be used in assessing this group's general education skills development and proficiency levels attainment when retested as second semester sophomores in Spring of 1994. A retesting of the 1991 class was also accomplished following the administration of this test to 160 sophomores in the spring semester. Analysis of both score reports were completed as soon as they were received. Comparative analysis of the findings were compiled and shared. The reports for the three administrations of The Academic Profile have yielded useful data that suggest gains in student skills development following the post-testing. These data will eventually form the basis for discussing the effectiveness or not of the new general education program.

Data collection, analysis and dissemination was an activity vigorously tackled by the Office of Assessment, Testing and Faculty Development in the course of 1992-93. Data from institution-wide testing, freshman survey, and questionnaires on faculty development activities (1987 - 1992) and future plans were collected, analyzed and

shared to inform administrative actions. Use of these data resulted in the following actions/decisions:

- Compilation of the profiles of "At Risk" students (all students enrolled in Developmental/Remedial courses);
- Establishment of VUU as a GRE testing center with the objective of encouraging students to focus on going to graduate school ;
- Exploration of the possibility of administering CLEP;
- Exposing students to standardized tests by organizing a GRE test familiarization workshop which was conducted by consultants from the Educational Testing Service;
- Offering two pre-testing of standardized instruments opportunities to the students;
- Offering a workshop and two mini-sessions in test-taking strategies.

One of the assessment strategies utilized at Virginia Union consists of evaluation of each individual who is involved with delivering the curriculum. This is contrary to the views expressed by Erwin (1991) alleging that current assessment efforts does not usually include evaluation of individual faculty. The University continues to use student evaluation of instruction to monitor the effectiveness of

instruction. Faculty groups played a major role in successfully designing, modifying and voting to adopt an in-house instrument for this purpose. Participation by four faculty members at a conference on evaluation in Orlando, Florida provided the impetus for this success in evolving a new student evaluation instrument.

Beginning with this academic year, every semester, all course offerings except laboratory, and independent studies, are evaluated by students. The planning, facilitation, compilation, and dissemination of data from the student evaluation of instruction activity is centrally coordinated. The university seeks to use data from this evaluation to study teaching effectiveness which is tied to learning outcomes and identification of instructional skills' strengths and weaknesses.

For the first time, it became possible in the course of this academic year to interface scanned data from the student evaluation of instruction process with a generic computer software written in COBOL by a faculty in order to generate standard reports. Data generated include reports on each individual course taught by a faculty member and summary reports for all courses taught by each faculty as well as departmental, school and university summary reports. Data yielded from this evaluation provide feedback to each individual

instructor to enable him/her contemplate on needed improvements that will enhance the learning process. The administration monitors this feedback carefully with the aim of gaining enlightenment on the effectiveness of instructional practices.

Furthermore, a holistic faculty performance profile resulted from the opportunities afforded some faculty members to attend another conference on faculty evaluation. Through this exposure, faculty groups were afforded opportunities that enabled them transform the way this academic enterprise carries on its business for the benefit of all concerned. Refining this new instrument continues to date. It is expected that it will be adopted for use by fall of 1994-95. Some of the major components to be evaluated by using this instrument are: publication in a journal, research, course development, conference attendance, paper presentation, formal study, and preliminary grant work (Jones, 1993).

The envisioned connection between faculty development and assessment is summarized by the following statement of commitment documented in Vision: 1991 (An executive summary of VUU's five-year plan for 1986-1991) "Faculty development will be necessary in order to more effectively teach courses tied to outcome measures ..." (p. 11)

To demonstrate this commitment, another post-school conference was hosted in May 1993. The workshops organized during this conference covered such topics as: basic elements of college teaching, testing/test construction and preparation of course syllabus. Three external experts from a nearby institution acted as facilitators for these workshops. Faculty was organized into three groups which were rotated to ensure that each group participated in each of the three sessions. A report on the findings from this Post-School Conference evaluation instrument was compiled and findings were shared with the administration.

Another major activity undertaken in the course of this year was to survey all faculty in order to (1) compile data on faculty development activities for the period 1987-92; (2) clarify professional development goals and objectives for 1992-93; (3) monitor and compile information on faculty participation in doctoral programs. Reports of these newly initiated surveys were compiled and disseminated. Data collected from the survey of faculty development goals/needs and activities were used to inform the administration on the kinds of professional development activities to target in the future.

Overall, Virginia Union's approach and vision of excellence are



congruent with Astin's definition of excellence as embracing talent development which is "determined by the quality and quantity of student (and faculty) learning and development" (Astin, A. 1990, p.25).

In pursuance of this objective, assessment activities are directed towards using testing feedback to reflect on student learning development and to identify instructional skills development needs of the faculty.

### **PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTATION**

In the connection between faculty evaluation and identification of faculty development activities that will remedy identified weaknesses in instruction, our progress has been slow. Faculty have identified areas that are in need of enhancement during the curriculum evaluation process. Some of these included grant writing and identification of methodology that would enhance instruction of students with academic deficiencies. Weaknesses of specific faculty as identified on student evaluations have not as yet been used to generate development activities. Nonetheless, financing these development activities will not be an easy task for this private university. However, the administration is committed to funding

professional development activities which have widespread assessment as well as faculty impact.

Recently, the problem of money to pay for standardized tests procurement has surfaced. Alternative approaches to testing all freshmen in PRE-POST mode is currently being discussed. The idea of tracking every student has been dropped. The present focus will be on tracking only those student defined to be "at-risk."

### CONCLUSIONS

The current Assessment, Testing, and Faculty Development Program, at VUU, is a five year program. We are now in the second year of this program. Faculty involvement and dedication in completing assessment related projects resulted in : modification and adoption of a new general education program; refining and implementing a process for student evaluation of instruction; implementation of a new freshman orientation program; adoption of an Honors Colloquium; the initiation of two new major programs - Criminology/Criminal Justice and Speech/Drama in response to shifting demands and on-going implementation of the assessment plan.

Virginia Union sees it as an imperative to maintain this vital link as a

testimony to what institutions do with the results of assessment. The three interlocking activities of assessment, testing and faculty development promote student learning and achievement of academic objectives. In the envisioned connection, the university consciously sponsors faculty collectively to acquire the skills needed to transform the curriculum, teach and test the students better, and become equipped to carry on with assessment oriented tasks such as identifying performance indicators, monitoring student development through the value-added approach which uses either standardized tests or in-house developed tests and survey instruments. Data from the testing programs and other surveys subsequently inform professional development activities of faculty which in turn enhance student development through improved teaching techniques. Thus it is obvious that the University consciously plans and provides opportunities and experiences which have widespread impact and would set in motion activities that make it possible to transfer acquired skills to classroom instruction, coursework related testing, quality of faculty production, and institution defined assessment projects. This is the vision for excellence at Virginia Union University.

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